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desire to repeat Mr Hunt's high-colored account of one who had been his friend, because we believe that he acted more from passion than duty.

What the destiny of poetry will be, we cannot pretend to determine. If, as Byron remarks in one of his letters, the poetical world is in a state of revolution, we trust, that, like other revolutions, it will terminate in improvement at last. The two faults of the age have been imitation and affected originality. It seems hard for a man of talent to confine himself to the footprints of those who have gone before him ; but he should reflect that excessive care to avoid this resemblance, shows a consciousness of inferiority, quite as often as imitation. We really think, however, that most of those who have dreaded resembling Pope, need have been under no apprehension, lest the likeness should be too striking. We allow that he was elaborate and artificial ; and those who find fault with him for this, would do well to remember that poetry is an art. If they say he was too elaborate and artificial, we can assure them that they do not mend the matter by going to the other extreme ; and we have no doubt that he will be found nearer to truth and nature than his opposers, when the question, What is truth and nature ? is determined, as it must be, by the prevailing sentiment of cultivated men.

ART. II.—1. *Edda Sæmundar hins Fróða, Edda Rhythmica sive Antiquior, vulgo Sæmundina dicta. Pars III. continens Carmina Voluspá, Hávamál, et Rigsmál. Accedit Magnússen (Finni) Priscæ veterum Borealiæ Mythologiæ Lexicon, &c.* Havniæ. 1828. 4to. pp. 1146.

2. *Svea-Rikes Häfder af E. G. Geijer.* 1sta Delen. Upsala. 1825. 8vo. pp. 605.

THE attention of the scholars of almost every country in Europe has been recently turned with renewed and fresh interest to the cultivation of their own native literature, language, and history. An exclusive devotion to classical models, and especially a subservience to those of French literature, have ceased to be the order of the day. None have labored with more zeal in this patriotic work than the Danes and Swedes.

They have found, too, an ample field of curious research and investigation, in the old monuments, relating to their early history, still preserved in the ancient Icelandic or Scandinavian tongue, the parent of the modern dialects of Sweden, Denmark, and Norway. There are no nations of modern Europe, who can trace back the authentic history of their ancestors so far in written records. We do not mean that the mythic and mythico-historical books of those remote times are always to be relied on, for particular facts and circumstantial relations of events, or as establishing an unbroken succession of kings or other chronological data. These are often, doubtless, mixed up with mythological fictions, and the false exploits of the gods attributed to real heroes. But what is of vastly more importance to the philosophical student of history, than any mere barren detail of dry facts, or long lists of kingly lines, like those which the weird sisters showed to Macbeth,—is the broad and strong light cast upon national manners, laws, religion, and other institutions, by these ancient works. Even those which are the most blended with fictions are not the least valuable in this respect. They trace the systems of religion on which the popular faith was founded, and describe to us the conduct of human agents under the influence of this belief. They paint the wars, and festivals, and loves of these ancient nations. They exhibit, in high relief, their manners and customs, laws, government, religious rites, and other peculiarities. So that when we strip off the poetical and mythic exterior of these monuments, we are presented with a living picture of the character and manners of our remote ancestors, true to nature, and valuable for its antiquity. But the national historians of Denmark and Sweden have not been satisfied with this general application of these remains of antiquity to the philosophy of history. They have sought in them for auxiliary evidence of particular historical facts and chronological data. They have been used for this purpose with great skill and ingenuity by *Suhm*, the Danish historian, who, by the aid of this clue, has succeeded in unravelling the intricate web of Danish history, and dissipating the obscurity which hung over the early annals of his country. The Swedish historians have also made a similar use of these materials, as we shall see hereafter.

The earliest emigration from the North, of which we have any authentic account, was that of the Cimbri and Teutones, who went forth from the Cimbriæ Chersonesus, about a century

before the Christian era, or in the year of Rome 640, in search of a new country in the milder climate of the South. The military genius of Marius saved Italy from the menaced consequences of this irruption, which came near to anticipating the fate of the *Eternal* city by several centuries; and we do not hear of another swarming from the great northern hive, until the Goths accomplished what their precursors had vainly attempted. Like all other nations, the Goths sought to illustrate their origin by boastful appeals to the achievements of their ancestors, who, in their migrations wars, and conquests, were led by heroes and demi-gods. Cassiodorus, the principal minister at the court of Theodoric, the Gothic king of Italy, compiled a Gothic history from the ancient chronicles and songs, which were preserved among them by oral traditions; and, Gibbon supposes, may have embellished it with such fictions of his own invention as would flatter the national vanity of these conquerors. But the light, thrown by more recent researches upon the history of the North, would seem to confirm the general authenticity of the materials from which he compiled. The original of this history is lost, and a very imperfect idea of its contents is to be obtained from the abridgment of Jornandes. But it represents the Goths to have left the Scandinavian peninsula, where they had been established by Odin, and to have settled on the southern shores of the Baltic, long before they made their irruption into the Roman empire. It is, however, a more probable opinion, adopted by some later historians, that the Goths in Scandinavia were rather a colony from those on the southern coast of the Baltic.

The Gothic class of languages belongs to the Japhetic, or Indo-Germanic family; and we have a specimen of one of these languages, of the Teutonic branch, (the *Mæso-Gothic*), in the version of the Gospels by Ulphilas in the fourth century.

But the oldest and most authentic monuments of northern history have been preserved in the ancient Scandinavian or Icelandic language, which is the parent of the modern dialects of Sweden and Denmark. This, too, belongs to the Gothic class of languages, and consequently to the Japhetic family, and has many internal marks of its oriental origin. In the year 874, A. C., Ingolf and several other distinguished chiefs of Norway, in order to escape from the intolerable tyranny of Harold the Fair-haired, who had reduced all the petty states of that country under his dominion, founded a colony in Iceland,

which had previously been discovered by the Norwegian navigators. The descendants of these fugitives preserved the knowledge of the Scandinavian language and literature in this sequestered island. The remote situation of Iceland from the great theatre of wars and revolutions on the continent, and consequently the external peace, together with the free, republican form of government, favored the cultivation of letters in this *Ultima Thule*, whilst the parent country was too often involved in darkness, bloodshed, and tyranny. Like those of most other uncivilized nations, the Scandinavian learning and history were preserved in oral traditions, long before any attempt was made to reduce them to writing. The Sckalds, like the rhapsodists of ancient Greece, and the bards of the Celtic tribes, were at once poets and historians. They were the companions and chroniclers of kings, who frequently entered the lists with them in their own art. An intercourse, pacific or warlike, was constantly kept up with the parent country, and the Sckalds were a sort of travelling minstrels, continually going from one northern country to another. A regular succession of this order of men was maintained; and a list of two hundred and thirty in number of those who were distinguished in the poetic art, in the three principal kingdoms of the North, from the reign of Regner Lodbrok to Valdemar the Second, is still preserved in the Icelandic language, among whom are several crowned heads. This Regner Lodbrok, who was a famous poet and pirate (!) reigned in Denmark about the commencement of the ninth century, and after many predatory excursions into different countries, was taken prisoner by Ella, a Saxon king of one of the petty states into which Britain was divided, and by an exquisite refinement of savage cruelty was left to perish from the venomous bites of serpents with which his prison was filled. An ode still exists supposed to have been sung by him in his torments, but doubtless composed by Brage the Old, or some other of the Sckalds, which is full of glowing anticipations of the felicity he was to enjoy in the hall of Odin, after such a long career of what, in that age, were called glorious achievements.

A collection of these traditional poems of the ancient Sckalds was made and reduced to writing, in the eleventh century, by Sæmund Sigfusson, who was born in Iceland about the middle of that century, and studied at Cologne, in Germany. This is what is called the *poetical Edda*. The original

text of this very ancient and curious book, with a Latin version, various readings, notes, glossary, &c. was begun to be published at Copenhagen in 1787. One volume of this work was issued in that year, under the superintendence of the learned men composing what is called the *Royal Arna-Magnæan Commission*, to whose care is confided a collection of Icelandic manuscripts, which is now in the library of the University at Copenhagen, and which was left by a native Icelander, Arne Magnussen, eminently skilled in the literature of his country. A second volume was published in 1818, which contains, principally, mythico-historical poems. These not only throw light on different passages of Scandinavian history, but illustrate the connexion between the history of the northern nations, and that of the Franks, Huns, and Burgundians, in their various wanderings, wars, and conquests. A third volume has just been published by Professor Finn Magnussen ;\* who is also the author of an essay which gained the prize offered in 1816, by the Royal Society of Sciences at Copenhagen, for a critical solution of the connexion between the religion of the Scandinavians and other northern nations, and that of the Indo-Persians, with a comparative view of the traditions, language, and monuments of this national family, published in Danish, 1824–1826, in four volumes, octavo. He has brought a vast variety of learning to bear upon this subject, and considers the Scandinavian mythology as mostly physical, and in this manner connects it with the mythic systems of the East. Professor Magnussen has also compared the mythic system of Ossian with that of the Scandinavian nations, in another essay, published in the *Transactions of the Scandinavian Literary Society*, and shown their identity, from which he infers the originality of the poems published by Macpherson.

The *prose Edda* is supposed to have been arranged in the beginning of the 13th century by Snorro Sturleson, born in Iceland in 1179, and descended from one of the most illustrious families of the republic, in which he had filled the highest offices with honor and distinction. Certain it is, that this *Edda* or prosaic Mythology (which may be compared to the Library

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\* This contains a Lexicon of the ancient Northern mythology, compared with the religious systems and rites of other cognate nations, such as the Germans, Persians, Indians, &c., with a view of the popular superstitions, the remnants of the ancient Pagan religion, which still prevail in the North of Europe.

of Apollodorus), being thought of little value, and perhaps rather scandalous than useful to Christian people, was continued by some other authors, with a view to explain the poetical imagery and circumlocutions in the songs of the *Skalds*, and this continuation is called *Skalda*. The prose Edda is a sort of *Ars Poetica*, intended to initiate young poets in the science of mythology and the poetical language. It was first edited, much altered and abridged, in 1665, by Resenius, with Latin and Danish versions by other hands. To this he appended two songs of the poetic Edda ;—the *Völuspá*, or poetical prophecy of Vala, which contains a sort of abridgment of the mythological system of the Edda in a very mysterious and often unintelligible style, resembling the Sibylline verses ; and the *Hávamál*, or sublime discourse of Odin, which is a metrical collection of moral precepts, not unlike the Proverbs of Solomon, or the Pythagorean *Carmina Aurea*. The best and most complete editions of the original text of the two Eddas, with various readings, &c. are those published by Professor Rask, at Stockholm, in 1818, in two separate octavo volumes. His eminent qualifications for the task, by his previous residence in Iceland, and his profound knowledge of the ancient languages and literature of the North, are well known and fully appreciated by all those acquainted with these subjects. The text of the poetic or elder Edda in this edition differs, however, but little from the large Copenhagen edition in three quarto volumes, mentioned above, except in being more accurately accented, having the *i* distinguished from *j*, *u* from *v*, *ö* from *o*, &c., and being of course, more legible to persons who have a tolerable knowledge of the common Icelandic. The songs are also placed in an order nearer to the original arrangement, and divided into two parts, the first of mythological, the second of heroical songs. But the text of the other, or the *prose Edda*, is almost entirely different from that in Resenius' edition, it being derived from the most ancient manuscript, called *Codex Regius*, from which Professor Rask never has deviated, except where some reading in the other ancient manuscripts on parchment, for critical reasons, seemed to be decidedly preferable. The *Edda*, properly so called, is here, for the first time, distinguished from the *Skalda*, with which it was confounded by Resenius, so that even some scholars have thought the *Skalda* a lost work, not perceiving that almost one half of it had been incorporated in Resenius' edition of the *Edda Snorronis*.

Various opinions have been maintained by critics, as to the share which Sæmund, who first gave to the world the poetical Edda, had in its composition. Some suppose, that he merely collected the Runic manuscripts of the different poems, and transcribed them in Latin characters. Others maintain that he collected them from the mouths of different Skalds, living in his times, and first reduced them to writing, they having previously been preserved by oral tradition merely. But the most probable conjecture seems to be, that he collected some from the poets of his day, and others from the scattered manuscripts written after the introduction of Christianity and *Latin* letters into Iceland, and merely added one song of his own composition, the *Sólar Liód*, or *Carmen Solare*, of a moral and Christian-religious tendency, so as thereby to consecrate, and to leaven, as it were, the whole mass of Paganism. He thus performed for these ancient poems the same office, which, according to the theory proposed by Wolf and Heyne, and generally adopted by the critics of Germany, was performed by the ancient Grecian Rhapsodist, who first collected and arranged the songs of his predecessors, and reduced them to one continuous poem, the Iliad. But that the odes now in question could not have been collected by Sæmund, or any body else, from Runic manuscripts, will be evident from the following considerations.

The Runic alphabet consists properly of sixteen letters, which are Phœnician in their origin. The traditions and chronicles of the North attribute their introduction to Odin. They were probably brought by him from the East into Scandinavia, but they have no resemblance to any of the alphabets of central Asia. All the ancient inscriptions to be found on the rocks and on stone monuments, which exist in the greatest number near Upsala, the principal seat of the religion of Odin, are in the ancient Scandinavian language, but in Runic characters. Some ancient coins exist with Runic legends engraved upon them. They were also used for inscriptions on arms, utensils, and buildings, and occasionally on wooden tablets for the purpose of epistolary correspondence. There is an allusion to this latter use of them in the *Atlamál in Grönlenzko*;\* and also in a Latin poet of the sixth century, Venantius Fortunatus, who asks his friend Flavus, if he is tired of the Latin, to write to him in Hebrew, Persian, Greek, or even *Runic* letters;

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\* *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróða*, Pars II. p. 422. Edit. Legat. Mag-næan.



‘ *Barbara fraxineis pingatur Runa tabellis,  
Quodque papyrus ait, virgula plana valet ;  
Pagina vel redeat perscripta dolatile charta,  
Quod relegi poterit, fructus amantis erit.*’

But they were principally used for lapidary inscriptions, and there is no evidence that any such thing as *books*, properly so called, existed among the Scandinavian nations before the introduction of Christianity. Ulphilas made use of the Runic characters in his translation of the Gospels into Mæso-Gothic in the fourth century, making certain alterations and improvements in the alphabet to accommodate it to his purposes. But the only manuscript which now exists in Runic characters, is a digest of the customary laws of Scania, which is supposed to have been written in the thirteenth century. A magical quality was attributed to the Runic characters by the ignorant superstition of the Scandinavians. This was artfully inculcated by Odin. In the poem which terminates the edition of the *Hávamál* by Resenius, he is represented as detailing the power of various charms composed of *Runes*, as adequate to heal diseases, to counteract poison, to enchant the arms of an enemy so as to render him impotent in battle, to still the rising tempest, to stop the career of witches as they ride through the air ; and he even boasts that by these magic spells he could raise the dead, and hold converse with them respecting the secrets of the invisible world. In the *Vegtams-Quida*, he is represented as mounting his horse *Sleipner*, one of the foul brood of the evil spirit *Locki*, and descending into the infernal regions to evoke the spirit of a deceased prophetess with Runic incantations, and to compel her to reveal future events respecting which the gods themselves were in doubt and alarm.

It is this passage which Gray has translated, or rather paraphrased ;

‘ Uprose the king of men with speed,  
And saddled straight his coal-black steed ;  
Down the yawning steep he rode,  
That leads to *Hel*’s dread abode.  
Him the Dog of Darkness spied,  
His shaggy throat he open’d wide,  
While from his jaws, with carnage fill’d,  
Foam and human gore distill’d ;  
Hoarse he bays with hideous din,  
Eyes that glow, and fangs that grin ;  
And long pursues, with fruitless yell  
The father of the powerful spell.  
Onward still his way he takes,  
(The groaning earth beneath him shakes,)

Till full before his fearless eyes  
 The portals nine of hell arise.  
 'Right against the eastern gate  
 By the moss-grown pile he sate,  
 Where long of yore to sleep was laid  
 The dust of the prophetic maid.  
 Facing to the northern clime,  
*Thrice he trac'd the Runic rhyme ;*  
 Thrice pronounced, in accents dread,  
 The thrilling verse that wakes the dead ;  
 Till, from out the hollow ground,  
 Slowly breath'd a sullen sound.  
 'Pr. What call unknown, what charms presume  
 To break the quiet of the tomb ?  
 Who thus afflicts my troubled sprite,  
 And drags me from the realms of night ?  
 Long on these mould'ring bones have beat  
 The winter's snow, the summer's heat,  
 The drenching dews, and driving rain !  
 Let me, let me sleep again.  
 Who is he, with voice unblest,  
 That calls me from the bed of rest ?'

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These magical qualities of the Runic letters are also described in the *Brinhildar-Quida*, (the Ode of Brynhilda.)\* We will give a short sketch of this legend, as it affords a very good specimen of the style and subjects of these singular compositions. *Sigurdr*, journeying to the south towards Franconia, sees upon a high mountain a flaming light. As he approaches it he enters a valley, and beholds what he supposes to be a man in full armor sleeping on the ground. *Sigurdr* takes off the helmet of the sleeper and discovers that it is an Amazon. Her armor clings to her body so that he is obliged to cut it off with his sword, when she arouses from this deathlike sleep, and inquires who has unbound the spell in which she lay entranced. *Sigurdr* informs her who he is, when she hails in mystic strains the cheerful light of day, pours libations to the fruitful Earth, and the other deities, and tells him that she is a *Valkyria* employed by Odin to watch the fate of battle, and give the victory to him to whom the god had decreed it ; she had unadvisedly interfered in a combat between two kings, to one of whom Odin had promised the victory, but she gave it to the other by cutting off his adversary's head. Whereupon the god struck her with his soporific wand (he is represented with this attri-

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\* *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróða*, Part II. p. 190.

bute of Mercury), and commanded her never more to engage in war, but condemned her to be married. The spirited Amazon vowed that she would marry no man who knew fear. Sigurdr, stimulated by curiosity and love, asks her to indoctrinate him in that lore which she had gathered in various regions, or as some commentators have it, various *worlds*, which she had visited,—for these wild and mystical poems are most of them susceptible of a mythic as well as a literal interpretation. Thus *Odin* is the supreme deity, as well as the conqueror, high priest, and king of the Scandinavians; *Asgard* is the Olympus of the northern deities, as well as the eastern city from which *Odin* is supposed to have come; the *Giants* are the Finns; the *dwarfs* are the Laplanders; the *Vani* are the Russians, &c.

Brynhilda then describes the qualities of the enchanted cup of liquor, which she offers to Sigurdr, strongly medicated with poetical inspiration, wit, and other good things; and instructs him in the magical virtues of the different hieroglyphic characters, and especially of those which *Odin* had expressed from the liquor (or had discovered when *inspired* by the influence of the liquor) distilled from the head and horn of *Heiddraupnir* and *Hoddraupnir*, two monsters whom he had vanquished and killed. The ode then makes a rapid transition, and abruptly introduces the god, as standing on a rock, ‘with naked sword and helmed brow.’ Having just decapitated *Mimis* the Giant, he compels, by Runic incantations and magical charms, the ghastly head to join in the colloquy. The head of the defunct Giant then becomes an interlocutor in the dialogue, utters oracles, and indicates the true magical characters, or *Runes*, and their various offices. Brynhilda then desires Sigurdr to determine whether he will pursue this course of philosophy any longer at the hazard of learning something fatal to his peace. But he declares that he will abide the disclosure, even if instant death await him in the decrees of fate. She then proceeds to read him a course of ethics, which in comparative purity and good sense is strangely contrasted with the grim features, that generally mark the religion of *Odin*. For instance,

‘And first this counsel take.—Towards thy kindred, lead a blameless life. Do not avenge, if they provoke; for this, they say, in heaven meets its reward.

‘Another I will give.—When thou swearest, speak nought but truth. Atrocious punishments await the perjurer’s crime.’

She proceeds to give him a great deal of other good advice,

and among the rest, to beware of 'the evil eye,'—of enchantments,—not to take a wife for her beauty or riches,—against hard drinking and quarrelling in his cups—if attacked by an enemy in his house, to go forth and meet him, 'for it is better to perish by the sword, than to be burnt up alive,'—and not to confide in the promises of the kindred of the man whom he has slain, 'for the wolf lurks in the little child, even if they have accepted the price of blood.' These counsels are followed by directions for burying the dead, 'whether they perish by disease, on the sea, or by the sword.'\* The story is continued in several subsequent cantos, comprising very beautiful specimens of these antique compositions, and containing a copious mine of poetical wealth, from which Olenschlæger and other living Danish and German poets have enriched their works. They are not only full of wild and beautiful poetry, and lively pictures of the manners and customs of the heroic age of the North, its patriarchal simplicity, its deadly feuds, and its fanciful superstition, peopling the earth, air, and waters with deities, genii, dwarfs, and giants; but there are many touches of the deepest pathos, to which the human heart beats in unison in every age and in every land;

'Sunt lachrymæ rerum, et mentem mortalia tangunt.'

This is especially true of the *Völundar-Quida*, and the succeeding connected odes; which have all the interest of a complicated drama from the variety of events, and of the characters, who are introduced and portrayed with exquisite skill, the scene continually changing from one country to another; and in which might be found the materials of many tragedies and tragic romances. How beautiful is the allegory of the Serpent

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\* These are, to prepare a *tumulus*, wash the body, comb the hair, bring it on a stone bier to the place of interment, and bid the deceased repose in peace. These stone biers are still used by the people of the North; and in Norway it is the custom to set down the body at the front door of the house, where a valedictory is pronounced, not by the minister of religion, but by some one of the peasantry. Before the arrival of Odin in the North, the usage of *interring* the bodies of the dead was universal. He introduced the custom of *burning* them, and collecting the ashes in an urn, which was deposited in the *tumulus*. But this usage never prevailed universally, and the primitive custom was subsequently revived, and must have been practised when the above poem was composed. The religion of Odin also inculcated the duty of wives' sacrificing themselves on the funeral piles of their husbands, and the Scandinavian chronicles and poems contain many traces of this practice.

who conceals the treasure, and, transmitting it from hand to hand, makes it the continual *stimulus* of new crimes of constantly increasing atrocity, and illustrates the dreadful power of the *auri sacra fames* over the heart of man!\* Such too is the story of the heroine who is represented in the *Gudrúnar-Quida in Fyrsta* (or First Ode of Gudrúna,) as standing by the dead body of her slaughtered husband Sigurdr, immoveable in her resolution not to survive him, and refusing to be comforted. The illustrious chiefs, and noble women ‘girt with gold,’ crowd around her, and vainly strive to console her grief and dissuade her from her fatal purpose. She sheds not a single tear, but remains a fixed picture of silent despair, whilst her female friends and companions endeavor to suggest topics of consolation from their own calamities and sufferings. Among these *Giaflauga* tells of her having followed to the grave five husbands, two daughters, and three sisters. *Herborga*, a queen of Hungary, has a sadder tale of woe to relate. She had lost seven sons, and her husband slain in battle, and her father, mother, and four brothers buried in a watery grave within a year; had been taken captive in war, and carried into slavery, where she was compelled ‘to loose and unloose the shoe-latchets’ of the chief’s wife, by whom she had been taken prisoner, and to perform other menial offices similar to those so much dreaded by Andromache in her parting speech to Hector. Still Gudrúna cannot weep, until they are about to remove the dead body of her husband; when they take off his robe, and, disclosing his gaping wounds, desire her to take the last kiss,—she bursts into a flood of tears. This tragic story ends by the return of Gudrúna into her native country, Denmark; but Brynhilda, the lover of Sigurdr, will not survive him. She commands eight of her male slaves, and five females to be slain, and falls upon her own sword.† These same persons and their tragical history make the subject of the old German epic poem *Nibelungenlied*, which is however much more modern in the form, in which it exists at present.

One of the most curious of the mythic poems contained in the Edda (volume first) is the *Vafthrudnismál*, which, like most very ancient writings of this sort, is in the form of a dramatic dia-

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\* *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróða*, Pars II. Proëm. p. xii. Edit. Legat. Magnæan.

† *Idem*. Part II. p. 270—284. Edit. Legat. Magnæan.

logue. Odin proposes to visit one of the most famous Giants, or Genii (the original word is *Jötun*, signifying one of the race of demigods), for the purpose of comparing the extent of their respective attainments in sacred science, and consults his wife, the goddess *Frigga*, 'to whom alone the future is known,' upon the subject of his enterprise.\* She with true feminine prudence counsels him to stay at home, where his godship is safe in the celestial mansion, 'for no one of the Giants is to be compared with Vafthrudnir in craft and valor.' But Odin persisting in his resolution, she vouchsafes him a favorable augury, and bids him have his wits about him, for her sake, and that of the other deities, whose fate was linked with his. Odin sets forth on his journey *incognito*, and comes to the hall of this giant, celebrated for his knowledge of sacred mysteries, which he approaches, and discovers that the master is at home.

'ODIN.

'Hail Vafthrudnir! I have at last reached thy mansion; but before I enter, first I would know if thou art indeed that wise and omniscient Genius.

'VAFTHRUDNIR.

'Who is this mortal, that thus accosts me in my palace? Unless thy wisdom exceeds mine, thou shalt never go hence.

'ODIN.

'Gagnráder is my name. I have been long on the road, and am both hungry and thirsty; I demand hospitality, Genius!

'VAFTHRUDNIR.

'Why then, Gagnráder, do you remain at the threshold? Come and take a seat in the hall, and we shall soon see who of the two is the wisest, the guest or the old speaker.

'ODIN.

'The poor man who enters the rich man's door should be frugal of his words.

'VAFTHRUDNIR.

'Tell me then, Gagnráder, if thou wouldst give a specimen of thy science, the name of that horse who drags the car of Day over the heads of mortals?

'ODIN.

'*Skinfaxi* is the horse called, who drags the car of Day over

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\* In this *mythus* a trait of the ancient manners of the North is glanced at, to which Tacitus has alluded in respect to the veneration in which women were held by these nations; '*Inesse quin etiam sanctum aliquid et providum putant: nec aut consilia earum adsperrantur, aut responsa negligunt.*' De Mor. Germ. cap. 8.

the heads of mortals,—the fleetest among horses, with the ever-shining mane.

‘ VAFTHRUDNIR.

‘ Tell me, Gagnráðr! if indeed thou wouldst give a specimen of thy science, the name of the horse, who drags the car of Night over the heads of the beneficent Deities ?

‘ ODIN.

‘ *Hrimfaxi* is the horse called, who drags the car of Night over the heads of the beneficent Deities, and the foam which distils from his mouth is the dew of Morning.’

The Giant, finding from the readiness of his guest in thus naming and describing Lucifer, Hesperus, and the other stars, that he had an antagonist worthy to enter the lists with him, invites Odin to take a seat by his side, and engage in a disputation upon the mysteries of sacred science, with this singular condition, that the losing party should forfeit his head ! Then begins the keen encounter of their wits, and Odin (who still keeps his *incognito*) commences the digladiation by asking the Giant, whence proceed the earth and the heavens ; who answers very learnedly and correctly, that the earth was created from the flesh of *Ymir*,—the rocks (primitive, transition, and all), from his bones,—the heavens, from his brain,—and the sea, from his blood.\* The god proceeds to interrogate the Genius (numbering his questions like a Chancery lawyer) upon the most puzzling points of cosmogony and theogony,—whence proceed day and night, winter and summer,—the creation of the human race, &c. His eleventh interrogatory regards the condition of departed spirits, and he inquires respecting the nature of the occupations of the heroes, who, having perished by a violent death, were alone thought worthy to enjoy the felicity of Odin’s *Valhalla*. The Giant answers, that they are daily engaged in martial exercises, similar to those in which they were employed on earth, and encounter each other in battle, in which real blows and even mortal wounds are dealt, and many are slain ; but at the signal given for the banquet, they arise, and march with the rest to the hall of Odin, to share in the feast prepared for them, and to quaff the liquor of the gods, and converse together in peace. These tournaments and feasts were to continue to the end of the present world. He then pursues his inquiries, respecting the destruction of the universe,

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\* Under this mythological imagery is described the creation of the external world from *Chaos*, typified under the form of the giant *Ymir*.

and the new creation by which it is to be followed, according to the mythological notions of the Scandinavians, evidently derived from the East, where that dogma had prevailed from very early times. He asks what is to become of Odin himself, in this final consummation of all things. To which Vafthrudnir readily replies, that *Femir* the wolf shall devour the 'Father of Ages' (Odin), and the whole world, with all things therein, both gods and men, shall be involved in one general conflagration. The pretended Gagnráðer at last asks the Genius what are the words which Odin whispered in the ear of his son, when the latter was placed upon his funeral pile. Whereupon the astonished Genius recognises Odin, and acknowledges himself vanquished in this intellectual duel.

‘VAFTHRUDNIR.

‘No mortal man those words can know which thou whisperedst in the ear of thy son at the beginning of ages. I read my doom, written in magic characters, and decreed by the celestial fates for having dared to encounter the all-wise Odin in sacred controversy.’

One of the oldest Danish annalists is Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote in the twelfth century, under the patronage of the celebrated Archbishop Absalon, minister of Valdemar the First and Canute the Sixth. That remarkable man, who united the apparently incompatible characters of churchman, warrior, and politician, and in each of them excelled the most conspicuous personages of his age, not only encouraged Saxo in the compilation of this work, but is supposed to have furnished him with great assistance in its progress. The genius of the historian does not however appear to have corresponded with that of the statesman by whom he was patronized. He attributes the foundation of the Danish monarchy to *Dan* (A. M. 2910), from whom the country was called *Dannmarck*. But other national authorities trace the origin of the name to the word *Dan* or *Dann*, which signifies *lowland* (and of which kindred forms remain in the modern dialects, as *downs* in English), being applied in opposition to the highlands of Norway and the mountain tracts of Sweden. In the preface to his work he professes to classify the authorities on which he proceeded. These are the old songs, odes, or chronicles in verse, by which the ancient Danes celebrated the exploits of their heroes; the Runic inscriptions found all over the North; the Icelandic chronicles and *Sagas*; and the relations communicated to him by Arch-



bishop Absalon. Some of these are certainly valuable, and indeed indispensable, materials for ancient Danish history. But this author wanted the skill to make the right use of them. He seems to have been a credulous pedant, incapable of distinguishing between those fictitious narratives, which are very good evidence of general manners, and those original documents which are alone sufficient to establish particular historical facts and the circumstantial details of events. His general authenticity is arraigned by the learned Torfæus, in his *Series Dynastarum ac Regum Danie*; who proves that Saxo Grammaticus had but a very limited acquaintance with the old traditional poems of his country, which besides are insufficient evidence as to the succession of kings or the chronological series of events; that the Runic inscriptions are of little or no value as illustrative of national history, since they rarely contain anything of a public nature, and are most of them obscure, effaced, or illegible; that the Icelandic chronicles and *Sagas* might indeed have been highly useful, had they been diligently studied by this author, which there is internal evidence they were not, since he is so often contradicted by these ancient writings; and, lastly, that we have no means of determining the precise value of the information received from Archbishop Absalon, since we do not know from what sources he himself derived it. From all which Torfæus concludes, that though the compilation of Saxo Grammaticus contains many curious particulars as to the antiquities of the North, it is entitled to very little credit in respect to authority, as he has blended the fabulous, the heroic, and the historical together, and has swelled the list of Danish monarchs to an inordinate length by confounding the various dynasties who reigned in the petty states into which the country was divided before the time of Gorm the Old.

Torfæus, who was himself a native of Iceland and deeply versed in Scandinavian learning, very laborious, diligent, and active in his inquiries, attempted to rectify these errors, and to settle the chronology of the series of Danish kings from a period a little before the commencement of the Christian era down to Gorm the Old in the ninth century, when the different parts of the monarchy were reunited, and from which epoch its indivisibility became, according to the Danish publicists, a settled constitutional maxim. He begins with Skiold, the son of Odin, making him the founder of the first race of Danish kings, retrenching the long line of preceding monarchs which the imagination or

anachronism of Saxo had supplied, and correcting the multiplied errors into which the latter had fallen as to the order of the succeeding reigns.

The chronological system of Torfæus appears to be followed by Suhm, and the best modern Danish historical critics. But to a foreigner, at least, it does not seem to be entirely free from objections similar to those which have been justly made to that of Saxo Grammaticus. The derivation of all the first dynasties of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway from Odin, is not a little startling, when we reflect that the kings of the Saxon heptarchy also traced their descent from *Woden*, and that the early history of all nations is filled with fabulous genealogies of their princes, deriving their origin from deified heroes. The Icelandic chronicles are doubtless curious and valuable monuments of national literature. But it must be remembered that they were collected from very remote oral traditions, handed down from one generation of Skalds to another, and first reduced to writing after the introduction of Christianity into the North. Though this does not in the slightest degree diminish their value as illustrative of national manners, polity, and religion, it would seem to render them less worthy of implicit credit as evidence of particular historical facts. Eleven centuries elapsed from the advent of Odin to the epoch of the first Scandinavian chronicler *in writing*, Is-lief, bishop of Skalholt in Iceland, who died in 1080. Even his work has perished, although it is believed to have been made use of by Are (the Learned), the friend and fellow-student of Sæmund, who first collected and published the poetical Edda. On the other hand, the power of oral tradition, as a medium of communication between ages remote from each other, ought not to be too much undervalued; especially where there is a perpetual order of men, whose exclusive employment is to learn and repeat, whose faculties of memory are thus improved by cultivation and carried to the highest pitch, and who are relied upon instead of historiographers to preserve the national annals. This is especially true where the compositions to be repeated are in a metrical form, which increases the facility of remembering them. Even after the Homeric poems had been reduced to writing, the rhapsodists still retained them so perfectly that they could readily recite any passage desired; and we are told of Calmuck poems of much greater length than the Iliad, which have never yet been reduced to writing, although their bards can repeat very large portions of them.

Many valuable materials for the history of the North have been collected and published since the time of Torfæus. But as he was a native Icclander, he had the facility of access to these in the original manuscripts, and has in fact used them with great diligence, and even critical skill, in his compilation. Professor P. E. Mùler, a living author deeply versed in these studies, has written a learned essay upon the sources from which Saxo Grammaticus derived his information, and also upon those which Snorro Sturleson used in the compilation of his history of the kings of Norway. The *Scriptores Rerum Danicarum* is a collection of chronicles and other materials for national history, commenced by Langabeck and subsequently continued by Suhm. It is printed in a very handsome manner, at the expense of the king. Seven volumes in folio have already appeared, and the eighth is now in the press. Several of the ancient *Sagas* which relate to the Scandinavian history previous to the introduction of Christianity, have been published at Copenhagen in the original Icelandic text, some with Latin and others with Danish translations. They are regarded as authentic materials for history ; not precisely chronicles, but family histories or annals, somewhat like those from which Livy and the other Roman historians principally compiled. There are other works which bear the same title of *Sagas*, but which are fictitious romances founded upon the exploits of the deities, kings, and chiefs of the heroic age. Some of these have been published in Sweden in the original, and some translations of such have appeared at Copenhagen.

One of the last authentic *Sagas* which have appeared there, is that entitled *Laxdæla-Saga*, which was published in 1826, under the direction of the Arna-Magnæan Commission, in the original Icelandic text with a Latin version. It is the history of a particular family, who inhabited a valley in Iceland near the river Laxá, so called from the abundance of salmon to be found in it. But, like most of these books, it branches out into general history, and goes back to the discovery of the island and its colonization from Norway in the time of Harold the Fair-haired, and comes down to the period when it was converted to Christianity. It is full of interesting details as to those remote ages and sequestered countries,—the modes of life of their inhabitants,—their hereditary feuds, wars, factions, trade, and fisheries,—and the exploits of the *Vikings*, who were nursed on the mountain wave, and boasted that they had never slept by a cottage fire. The scene is not confined to Iceland, but spreads

itself to Norway, the Orkneys and Ferroe islands, Ireland, and Scotland. Five kings of Norway, and one of Ireland, figure as actors. The narrative is conducted in the most animated strain; the characters are portrayed with fidelity in their minutest lineaments, and we see and hear them in every act of private and public life, as if we were actually present; whilst there is every internal evidence to attest the authenticity of the narrative, and to convince us that we are not entertained by a fiction.

It thus appears that there exist very extensive, and, if they were used with sound judgment, authentic materials for the early history of Denmark. These materials have been collected, excerpted, and arranged with immense erudition and incredible diligence by the great Danish historian P. F. Suhm, who devoted his life and fortune to that purpose. His scattered writings have been collected in fifteen volumes, octavo, containing among various treatises and papers of very different value, one (volume ninth) on the difficulties in writing the ancient Danish and Norwegian history. But his historical writings consist principally of the following very laborious and voluminous works. 1. Preparatory essays for the proper history of the North, namely, on the Pagan religion, on the origin of the Northern nations, on their various emigrations, and a critical history of Denmark during the dark and fabulous ages; making, in all, ten volumes in quarto, except one, containing genealogical tables, in folio. 2. The history of Denmark from Gorm the Old to about the year 1400, making fourteen volumes in quarto, which has been completed during the present year by the learned Professor Nyerup, who was for a long time Suhm's librarian. The style of Suhm is by no means attractive, nor is his judgment very acute, nor his reasoning clear and cogent; but he has amassed the materials and cleared the ground for a future architect.

The best Swedish history hitherto completed, is that by Professor Lagerbrink of Lund, the cotemporary of Suhm, published at Stockholm in 1769-83, in four volumes quarto. He is much inferior to Suhm, however, in research and learning, and perhaps even in style and impartiality. But as the best *subsidia* to Northern history were published at Copenhagen after his work was commenced, or even finished, the author is in a great measure excusable for these defects. Some of the mistakes into which he has fallen in respect to the more ancient

portion of this history have been lately corrected in two volumes of *Annotations to Lagerbrink*, &c., published by the present royal historiographer of Sweden, Mr *J. af Hallenberg*. The achievement of a good national history of Sweden seems in a fair way of being accomplished by Mr *Geijer*, the author of the work, the title of which is prefixed to the present article. The first volume of this work, which (when finished) is intended to be a complete history of Sweden, was published at Upsala in 1825. It contains, 1. A geographical view of the country. 2. An account of the notions which the Greeks and Romans had of the North, and the Gothic emigrations. 3. The Scandinavian, and especially Swedish sources of historical information. 4. The Runic monuments. 5. The Icelanders, and their poetry and history. 6, 7. The mythological and heroic history of the North. 8. The history of the *Ynglinges*, or first Swedish dynasty, descending from Odin. 9. Critical remarks on that period. 10. The *Ynlinges* in Norway, and the history of Regner Lodbrok and his sons. But as this article has already extended to a greater length than we had intended, we will merely add, that it relies on the best authorities existing, and is composed with a very judicious choice of materials, of which the book itself contains a critical account.

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ART. III.—*The Life of Elbridge Gerry, with contemporary Letters, to the Close of the American Revolution*. By JAMES T. AUSTIN. Boston. Wells & Lilly. 1828. 8vo. pp. 520.

It has been sometimes remarked, in substance, that the Revolution is becoming a trite theme. This is a great error; its interest is daily increasing. The circumstances, that the generation by whom it was accomplished has almost wholly disappeared; and that the generation, which succeeded that of the Revolution on the active stage of life, is already in retirement, heighten instead of diminishing, the interest of that great event. It is viewed by a new generation of men, educated to new ideas, and new destinies. It is viewed through a new medium, that of oral tradition, growing every day more general and faint, and of written accounts, multiplying in the same ratio. It is in the nature of tradition, to select only